A Newton Abbot resident remembers World War II

Blackout

In the early days of the war it was necessary to "black out" all windows and we soon found that we would be eating less food. The shops were besieged by people wanting black material to cover windows. Some made light wooden shutters whilst others dyed curtains black. It was also necessary to put curtains over front and back doors to keep the light from showing when going in and out of the house when it was dark. These precautions were taken to protect us from enemy bombers flying over at night.

There were very few cars about owing to the rationing of petrol, but also because fewer people owned cars. I remember my grandfather, who was a builder, driving down to see us and nearly getting caught in an air raid at Exeter. Cars had to have special coverings on their headlights. The blackout could be quite dangerous and although there were fewer cars, there were still accidents.   We carried torches but had to be careful with the use of them. It was quite commonplace to bump into someone when walking along on a very dark night in unlit streets. One Newton Abbot Doctor was reputed to have driven his car down over Powderham Steps up from Wolborough Hill – but fortunately no-one was hurt.

Some people were fined for showing a light from a window, no matter how weak the light. The fine was often £1, which was a lot in those days. I remember that my first pay as a Library Assistant was six old shillings and nine pence a week, and after five years, when I left to go to college to become a teacher, I was only earning £2 a week. Air Raid Wardens would patrol the streets and call out "Put that light out!". Searchlights scanned the skies on dark nights looking for enemy aircraft, weaving patterns.